

When You're A Leader . .



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Foreword

This bulletin is written for those who have accepted a position of leadership in their community. Its purpose is to present some of the aspects of the job of the volunteer leader, and the importance of such service to both the individual and the group. It is hoped that it will encourage people to undertake leadership in their community and that it will increase the satisfaction and enjoyment of their job.

Drawings by Clara Straight

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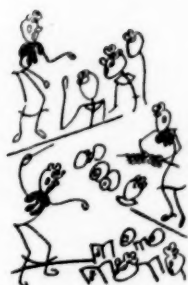
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When You're A Leader

HELEN P. HOEFFER AND IRENE PATTERSON

A Leader Is A Group Member



Any member of a group can be a leader and you can take your turn at some form of leadership.

You may be elected or appointed to serve or you may volunteer to be a leader. Either way, you have a two-fold job: to help each person in the group gain satisfaction and enjoyment from the group activities; and to accomplish whatever purposes the group sets for itself.

Every group has a different aim, according to the persons enrolled and the purpose for which it is organized. An experienced group will use the wide range of leadership among its membership. Everyone can be a leader at some time. Mrs. Jones is a good organizer, Mrs. Smith is an excellent discussion leader, Sally Williams has a knack for showing others how to do things, Mary Brown is skillful at directing social activities.

Everyone has some special ability; as that ability is used by the group, that person is in a position of leadership. The leadership developed by each member increases the strength of the group.

What Kind of A Leader Are You?

A leader who says, "What do you think?" or "How can we do it?", makes it possible for others to express their ideas. Thus, enthusiasm for a program often develops and grows within the group. Members who feel free to make suggestions are often more ready to carry out plans, with the result that it is a group activity, not a leader's job. Shared leadership lightens the load of any one person and is apt to bring pleasure and satisfaction to everyone.

A leader who talks about "my program," "my group," and who says, "I think," or "we won't do it this way," assumes that she is expected to make all the decisions, and feels that the success of the program depends on her alone. The group reacts in the same way. The leader gets less and less response from members. Have you seen this happen to groups in which you were a member?

As a leader you are not a boss, nor a dictator, nor do you do everything for the other fellow. Your job is to work *with* people, not *for* them, or *on* them. You need to help both individuals and groups to see problems clearly. In that way they are better able to solve problems or make decisions. As a leader you work with the group.

Why Be A Leader?

Do you feel proud and pleased when you are able to help others to learn? Do you enjoy meeting people and making new friends? If you like working with people, the rewards of being a leader far outweigh the headaches and heartaches. Contrary to the old notion of "born leaders" don't you find that leaders are often made by the groups they serve? It is well known that men and women gain self confidence when they know that others have confidence in them.

Similarly, working with people will help you to become more sensitive to their needs and more aware of what they can do. Being able to understand others will contribute as much to your personal development as will all the information you learn.

We know of a woman who spent her young married years raising her children; she had little opportunity for social life. She helped to organize a study group in her community but was very shy about taking part as a leader. Then she was persuaded to act as secretary and to take an increasingly prominent part in the program. She gained poise and confidence and today can lead a group without hesitation or anxiety. She is an example of a leader who learns her job as she goes along and gains much satisfaction in the doing of it.

New friends

Being a leader also means meeting new people. You are bound to widen your circle of acquaintances while attending training school, arranging for a program, collecting information or equipment. These acquaintances often deepen into friendship as a result of working together.



New learnings

Another advantage is the opportunity to learn new things that you can use at home. Some say the best way to learn is to teach someone else. Don't you find that learning something new and then teaching it to others, makes it easier to understand and use for yourself?

Next best to having information is knowing where to get it. As a leader you have the benefit of training schools and of materials prepared for leaders.

You also learn likely sources of information, such as experiment stations, libraries, bulletins, and magazines.

Being a leader, therefore, can bring big dividends. You will make many new friends. You will learn new and interesting information. Above all, you will learn more about your fellowmen and more about yourself. You'll have fun, and you'll be useful too.

The Leader Acts as Chairman

The chairman of a group might be compared to the driver of an automobile. The automobile may be in perfect running condition. Each part is waiting to do its share. But the car cannot start until the driver turns the key in the switch and steps on the starter.

The same is true in a meeting. Each one may be ready to do her bit toward its success, but the group doesn't go ahead until the chairman does her part.

The group doesn't "come to order" until the chairman asks that it does. A committee doesn't report until it is asked to report. Group decisions about what to do and how to do it come as a result of discussion planned for by the chairman. It is much easier for other leaders to do their part if they know that they have a certain amount of time in the program and if they are introduced in a friendly way to the group. This is possible only if the chairman has a careful plan for the entire meeting.

A local leader told the story of a church meeting she once attended at which she had been asked to speak about the church budget. When she arrived no one spoke to her or greeted her in any way.

The meeting started and the business of the day proceeded. Finally, the chairman said, "Some woman was to be here today to talk about money. If she's here, we can give her a few minutes now. We really haven't much time."

You can well imagine the lack of enthusiasm this introduction gave the speaker and the lukewarm response with which the group received her. Needless to say her contribution amounted to practically nothing. The chairman made it difficult because she did not know the speaker and because she showed no interest in her being there.

Books, pamphlets, and other materials on parliamentary procedure are available for leaders who hold an office. From such sources you can learn how to dispatch business in quick and orderly fashion. This important information is easily obtained.

Over and above that, a successful presiding officer needs to be a friendly, sympathetic person, interested in each member, and interested in the purposes and ideals of the organization which she represents. The ordinary rules of courtesy are excellent guides for the chairman. Friendly introductions of both members and visitors, sincere appreciation and a cordial "thank you" for the work of a committee or an individual, are courtesies a chairman needs to

follow. She also needs to be an attentive listener. She can do this only if she sees to it that only one person speaks at a time. This is a courtesy rule as well as good parliamentary procedure.

As long as the chairman follows these rules she may expect members of her group to follow them also. If she is sarcastic, unpleasant, and unorganized she can expect somewhat the same behavior from those with whom she works. If she is pleasant, considerate of others, and interested in their ideas, she is apt to develop a group that works well together.

Leaders Have Responsibilities

Elected, appointed, or volunteered, you have accepted a responsibility which should be a challenge to you and from which you can gain much satisfaction and fun. It may sometimes bring you disappointment. It's all part of the price of leadership.

Did you ever stop to think about all the leaders in a group? They may be officers, or the chairmen of committees or persons who lead discussions, or give demonstrations. They are the ones who carry the ball for a meeting. They are the ones who have the responsibility for starting and closing the meeting, for the business that is transacted, and for teaching that is done. They are the ones who give the program order and continuity. They set the stage so that everyone has the opportunity to learn. They make it possible for members to express their opinions and their wishes and to participate in the activity of the group in an orderly way.

Persons who have accepted positions of leadership are the ones who hold the key to the successful meeting. Successful meetings are usually a pleasant and worthwhile experience.

Making Meetings Pleasant

A personal greeting of some kind, a recognition of their appearance at a meeting pleases people. It's a gesture, but an effective one in setting the stage for the business to be discussed, or the program to be carried on. It helps to overcome any feeling of strangeness and helps each individual to feel that she belongs to the group.

People like to be comfortable at a meeting. The temperature, seating, lighting, and other details all contribute to a pleased and receptive audience. This doesn't mean overstuffed furniture and indirect lighting. It means an arrangement that makes seeing and hearing easy for everyone. It means a comfortable temperature, not one that sends you to sleep or freezes you stiff.

People like well-planned meetings. A meeting run without wasting time pleases the group. Sometimes time is wasted because of lack of planning; sometimes because the chairman fears to take the reins which have been given to her. When this happens, meetings drag, attention lags, interest goes



in other directions. People are bored and may start to gossip. Alert well-organized programs please people and hold their interest.

People like sociability. Another thing that pleases people is having an interval to visit together. It is well to provide time for sociability. Sometimes this is best done during a short recess or it may be done over a cup of tea and a cookie at the close of the program. If time isn't wasted during the program and if everyone knows that time for visiting has been planned, talking at the wrong time is likely to be less.

For some groups a short recreation or entertainment period is pleasing. It should not interfere with the "meat" of the meeting, nor make the program too long. A game, a stunt, or a song in which everybody takes part can add enthusiasm and spirit to a meeting.

Some groups may consider recreation as wasted time and energy. In other groups it may help to develop an atmosphere of solidarity.

What Helps People to Learn

Men and women come to these meetings because they want to learn; therefore, the leader starts with an advantage. Anyone is most likely to learn when she wants to know how to do some particular thing. Suppose that Mrs. Smith does not knit but she wants to make mittens like those Sally Jones is knitting. Sally has told her that it is easy to learn how and has offered to help her get started.

Mrs. Smith is eager to learn and keeps trying until she gets a mitten made. Sally "stood by" to show and encourage her until Mrs. Smith felt ready to knit alone. Mrs. Smith kept practicing until she felt that she had accomplished something; then she began to enjoy doing it. After she has learned to do by doing, she may decide that it is easy to learn something new, and that it is also fun. Learning new things often encourages more learning, for success begets success.

We learn by our experiences. They may come to us through feeling, hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, or any combination of these. Each experience strengthens another and helps us to understand more clearly. That is why knitting a mitten meant more to Mrs. Smith than did merely seeing Sally's mittens, and being told how to make them.

Leaders are often surprised to find that the members of a group don't all learn the same thing, nor do they learn what you expected them to learn. No one person in a group is likely to understand or remember everything that is taught at one meeting.

Even though we all look at the same thing each one of us sees something different about it. Remember what happened to you and your friends attending the county fair. When you discussed it later nearly everyone noticed something different and remembered a little or a lot of what they noticed. Your group will be like that—some may remember much of what is discussed. Some will remember only a little but that little will make a difference because it just “touched the spot.”

Each individual has a different background and a different purpose. Therefore, she learns whatever makes connections with something she already knows about or sees a way to use immediately.

Where A Local Leader Gets Information



Many organizations have some plan for training their leaders. If you are a local leader in the Extension Service, you attend a training school and receive scientific information in a specific area of homemaking. These training schools are conducted by Extension specialists or by county agents. Up-to-date information is also available from bulletins, movies, mimeographed material, or recordings.

Other organizations, such as the Parent Teacher Association, have similar types of training programs for their leaders.

As a leader, you will probably need additional sources of information. Local libraries will help you obtain good reference books if you explain why you need them. Current magazines also provide helpful suggestions. In these you can often find a “picture that tells a story.” Sometimes, too, there are articles that present opposing points of view on a subject, which may be useful to you in preparing a discussion meeting.

In every community you will find individuals who can give you valuable help. The school nurse may be willing to help with your home nursing program, or the freezer-locker manager with your food preservation program. Take a look at your community and choose the person who can help you the most.

Don't forget or minimize your own experience through which you learned a great deal. These experiences can be an asset or a handicap according to how you use them. As a leader, do not let your past experience keep you from adopting new ideas based on scientific research.

If you are teaching, your job is to present information accurately, rather than to make judgments on particular problems. Your function is to help people solve their own problems by using the information you may bring them and not to solve their problems for them.

The inexperienced leader is not expected to be an expert in any field of subject matter. She can help people a great deal if she knows where to find up-to-date information and is willing to use it.

A Leader Uses Tools

Before anyone can use a tool effectively, she must know what it is for and how to handle it reasonably well. A teacher or a leader uses tools in her work just as a homemaker or a doctor does. She must know the teaching tools and how to use them to get what she wants.

Demonstrations

If you, as a leader, want to show someone how to use a piece of equipment, or to make a bound buttonhole, the best tool is probably the demonstration. If you want to teach how, plus the reasons why, you will talk and demonstrate too. You may use slides or photographs to illustrate particular ideas or points that you believe are important. Recently, good movies have been made of people giving demonstrations such as canning or freezing food. Such films could be used in place of a demonstrator, if you have a projector and if the film teaches what you want to teach.



Discussions

If you are interested in helping people to see both sides of an issue, you could try discussion. This is also a good way to help people to understand each other better and to learn why all members of the group do not agree on the question under discussion. Films or recordings which present problem situations, or a point of view, are often good discussion starters.

Talks

If you want to give some new information or present facts to a group, you will just talk to them. Talks should be short and to the point. They may be illustrated with charts, photographs, or an exhibit that shows the important idea you want to get across. Recordings or transcriptions made by an expert or an authority are often good ways to present new or unusual information to a group. They are frequently available to small groups when the expert isn't.

The Leader Demonstrates

Showing people how to do something is a very old teaching method.

Mothers have passed on their homemaking skills from generation to generation in that way. This has been done in part by demonstration.

Have you ever shown your next-door neighbor how to prune the rose bush in her garden? Let's take a look at this experience. Before you taught your neighbor how to prune the rose bush in her garden, you had to know how to do it. Very likely she asked you about it because she had seen you pruning your bushes and had admired your beautiful roses. Because of your experience in pruning rose bushes, you knew how to show your neighbor the way to do it.

As you showed her how to prune, *you told her why* you chose certain stems to cut and why you left certain others. The neighbor was able to *see* what you did, and to *hear* why you did it. Doubtless, she was near enough to you to see easily, *and if she didn't understand, she asked questions.*

Then, of course, you had to have a pair of pruning shears. If she was an inexperienced gardener, you may have had to introduce her to the pruning shears. After you had shown her what to do with one rose bush, did you let her prune the next one? It's the only way you could be sure she knew how to do it.

This example has all the makings of a good demonstration. Let's look at it again. What are the essential points?

1. You showed someone *how* to do something she wanted to know
2. You knew how to do it and could do it easily
3. You had the necessary tools
4. You told her *why* you did it that way
5. You were able to show the finished job
6. You answered questions that she asked
7. You let the learner try her hand at it

It was easy to show your neighbor how to prune a rose bush, wasn't it? Demonstrating to a group of people is really much the same.

Almost everyone who is at the meeting will be there because she is interested in your demonstration. You can keep that interest if you really know the material you are presenting, and if you have all the essential steps of your demonstration clearly in mind. An explanation of each step as you go along helps to hold the interest. This requires careful planning before the demonstration. It frequently requires practice.

It is also important that everyone can see what you're doing and hear what you say. Almost any room can be arranged so all can see and hear.

Check to see that you have the needed equipment ready before the meeting begins. When you have it arranged take a look at it from the back of the room. Are you working in full view of the audience? Is the space at the front of the work table clear?

Be sure everybody sees the finished product and tastes it if it is something to eat.

The Discussion Leader

Leading a discussion group can be fun. It's good conversation centered around a subject that is of interest to all members of a group.

A discussion leader is in a position somewhat like that of a hostess in her own home. As a hostess you make sure that everyone knows the others, and that all are comfortable. You try to make them feel "at home," and as if they belong to the group. Before your guests arrive, you check the arrangement of the furniture to make sure that no one of your guests will be alone or separated from the group.

As hostess you try to keep the conversation of general interest. You don't let any one person dominate it. The talk is about things that everyone knows about and is interested in.

Many of these same ideas are true in discussion leading. First a discussion leader has to recognize that people can't talk on a topic they know nothing about. They can't think without information. Hence the importance of discussing problems that people have some information about, or some experience with.

If they need more information, the leader has some responsibility for helping them to find it. Books, bulletins, or magazine articles, are all helpful. The discussion leader may be responsible for having facts available about the question to be discussed either in the form of statements from authorities, or by having people present in the group who have the facts. These people may be experts in the field, or they may be group members who have been assigned the task of searching out the facts.

Then, just as a hostess does, you look at the physical setting for your discussion group. Does the arrangement of the chairs make it easy for one to talk to others? Is any one obliged to talk into the back of the neck of someone else? Any arrangement is good if everyone can easily see and hear other members of the group and if it is easy for people to talk together.

Is there enough light so that everyone can see well? Does anyone have to look into light that is glaring or too bright?

As the group gathers, you need to be sure that each member is introduced. It is important that people know both the name of each person and also something about her interests and the group she represents. Such information helps in interpreting what is said in the discussion.

When the discussion begins it is your responsibility to see that the topic for discussion is clearly stated. You may want to sketch briefly some of the reasons why the subject was selected. This is the time for you to introduce any "source"



people who may be present, or to read or to have read any statements bearing upon the discussion. If you are using a film or a transcription as a discussion starter, you will probably use it at the beginning of the discussion.

Discussion is conversation about one subject. It flows not from the leader to a member of the group, but from member to member. The leader always wants to be on the alert to keep the discussion on the subject, and to call attention to ideas or points of view which may strengthen each other. Watching the facial expression of your group for evidence of interest in the subject or possibly boredom is important to you in sensing the tone of the group.

Remember discussion is not primarily for the purpose of finding answers. Many questions, particularly those on which there is considerable difference of opinion, can be talked over in a free and friendly way. It will bring about better understanding of different points of view and will give each individual a better basis on which to draw his own conclusions.

You may find as a discussion leader that the group all want to talk at once. This is an indication that interest is keen, that the subject is vital and important. You will need to call to your aid the ordinary rules of courtesy. You may hold up your hand, or shake your head, smile and say, "One at a time, please." This will help, particularly if you assure each one that she will have an opportunity to speak.

More often, you will find that no one wants to talk. This is one of the nightmares of an inexperienced discussion leader. This sometimes happens because the discussion has not been planned for, or the subject is not understood by everyone in the group.

If your group is interested in a subject which is not sufficiently within their experience to discuss, do not attempt a discussion. Instead devote a part or all of the meeting to learning about the subject. You may do this through a lecture, reading material, a movie, or recordings. Then give the group time to think about what they learned before they meet for discussion.

The Leader Gives a Talk

Sometimes you want to give your group new information. It may be about an old subject, or you may introduce a new topic.

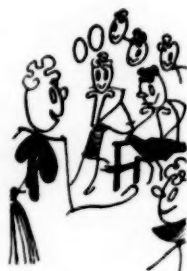
Every talk needs to be prepared carefully. When you are preparing it try to think of yourself as a member of the audience. Ask yourself a few questions:

What is there about the subject that interests me?

How would I like to have it presented?

How much would I like to hear?

Why is it important to me?



If you answer these questions *honestly* it will help you select the ideas that are of first importance, and to discard some which may not be important.

Too-short a talk is better than *too-long* a talk. A short talk often arouses curiosity, so that the audience wants to know more. A cartoon or a good story to illustrate why your subject is being talked about now can be a good beginning. Charts or posters which can be studied afterwards are good ways to keep up interest and encourage discussion of what you say.

The information you give in a talk should be accurate. Frequently it is wise to give people suggestions about where they can get more information if they want it. It gives the audience confidence in what you are saying.

Be sure the audience can hear what you have to say. You can't expect them to be interested in a talk they can't hear.

Stories that illustrate or strengthen a point, charts, or photographs that show contrasts or comparisons, all add interest and make the ideas clearer and easier to remember.

How Successful Is Your Teaching?

You will be anxiously asking yourself whether you've really taught your group anything. What are the signs? One sure sign is that the group keeps on coming to meetings. They don't have to come; if they do, you can be sure that there is something to be said for your teaching. Another sign to watch for is the number of different persons who ask questions. It often shows real interest. Are you able to get people to exchange ideas rather than having to supply the answers yourself.

Perhaps you'll find that people have tried out what you told or showed them. Do you encourage members to show or tell what they have been able to do at home? It may take years to know how successful you've been. Maybe long afterwards an acquaintance will tell you how often she has made the coffee cake that you once demonstrated. Maybe you'll hear that your discussion group on the problems of adolescence was a great help to a neighbor with a growing family.

Do you watch how many people join in a discussion and what sort of contributions they make? Does the group consider facts before making a decision? Is discussion kept impersonal and directed to the interests of the group? Are the members learning to say "we" or "our" in speaking of group activities, rather than "I" or "my." These are all points towards knowing how successful you have been.



When You're a Leader

Leaders are not born, nor do they become leaders by leading the group once. Experience is probably the best way to develop leadership.

When you welcome opportunities to be the chairman, the discussion leader, or serve the group in other ways, you too, may become a leader.

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